

Two Poets of the Peasantry

47

repeated by Milton the better to annoy the same bishop, who had rashly claimed to be himself the first of English satirists. It is even possible that Milton may also have read the C-text, then only in manuscript, if indeed he borrowed from Langland that infernal artillery which too successfully bowls over the angels, and the reader also, in *Paradise Lost*. But that is not, after all, so happy an idea that it might not have occurred to both writers independently. So too, though Bunyan may have read his predecessor both for *The Pilgrim's Progress* and for *The Holy War*, it has to be remembered that allegories tend of their nature to have a family likeness. To some, indeed, these years when a Puritan farmer of Huntingdon had become master of England and the dread of Europe, may well have seemed the reign of Piers Plowman realised on earth. But with the Restoration the writer whom Fuller could still celebrate as 'the Morning-star' of the Reformation and 'by *Prolepsis* a Protestant' was fast setting out of sight. The eighteenth century leaves him to its learned—Hearne, Percy, Warton, Tyrwhitt, Ritson. Byron indeed, who in 1807 finds him superior to Chaucer (a writer 'obscene and contemptible'), may even have read him. The fact remains that for two hundred and fifty-two years, from 1561 to 1813, there was not a single edition. Since

then posterity has made amends, above all
by the devoted
work of Skeat. And if the poet has been
torn limb from
limb by Professor Manly and his followers,
he has been
admirably put together again and his
integrity defended
by the late M. Jusserand, most cultured and
persuasive of
ambassadors, and by Professor R. W.
Chambers.

Indeed perhaps a little more than due
amends have been
made to him. When scholars have given,
pelican-like,
their heart's-blood to reanimate some
creation long dead,
it is most natural that they should be tempted
to over-value